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ABSTRACT

In spite of increasing amounts of attention given to mentoring in recent years, it appears that the disadvantaged child is not being mentored, and that his or her educational needs are not being addressed. Some possible reasons why so little mentoring of minority students occurs, or reasons why so little is heard about what does occur, are suggested. These reasons relate primarily to higher education, and include: (1) students who were mentored are unable financially to complete their educations; (2) family expectations may interfere with education; (3) mentored students may become lost in an educational bureaucratic shuffle; (4) life events may derail a student; (5) elementary and secondary education may not have adequately prepared a student; (6) potential mentors may not have wanted to invest the time; (7) mentored students may not have learned necessary skills for achieving success; (8) student involvement in drugs and alcohol may terminate growth and development; (9) a mentor may not have been an adequate role model; (10) some mentors may not relate well to the culturally different and disadvantaged; (11) some students do not fit the mentor's mold; (12) support systems may be lacking in colleges; (13) some mentors simply do not have enough time; and (14) the college or university may have other priorities for those who would be good mentors. There is a 10-item list of references. (SLD)

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Mentoring Disadvantaged Gifted Children and Youth

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Abstract

While mentoring has been seen as a critical process to aid in the development of gifted persons, sadly, disadvantaged children do not appear to be able to procure mentors or there is less investment in the disadvantaged by those who would be mentors. This paper addresses these issues and explores concerns regarding the mentoring of the disadvantaged.

The process of mentoring has received increasing amounts of attention in the last ten years. Books by Torrance (1984) and Goff and Torrance (1991) have attempted to assist mentors in their tasks. Articles by Shaughnessy (1986) , Shaughnessy and Neely (1991) and Shaughnessy, Neely and Cordova (1990) have discussed mentoring the creative, the gifted, and women and minorities, repectively. Shaughnessy, Jausovec, Lehtonen and Kamila (1991) have reviewed mentoring in the U.S. and other countries.

In spite of many efforts, it appears that the disadvantaged child is however, not being mentored and his or her educational needs are not being addressed. E.Paul Torrance (1991) has indicated the dire need for disadvantaged (and all others) to have a mentor, a sponsor, a patron or some helping person ! Torrance has indicated that " mentors aid in creative achievement, yet mentors have rarely been available to children living in poverty or who come from minority backgrounds " (p. 5) Torrance (1983) has critically examined the role of mentors in creative achievement.

Why is it that we invest so little in minority groups or why is it that we hear so little from those who have been mentored later in life?

There are probably some tentative hypotheses which need to be examined and explored.

1) Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may have been mentored at one time, but later in life they have been unable financially to further their progress or education.

2) Familial expectations may be operative. Son or daughter may be expected to support the family or assist in the home and not pursue their education.

3) Many mentored students may later simply become lost in the big beauracratic structure that we call " the university " or college.

4) Some students become " derailed " i.e. the creatively talented girl may become pregnant. The financially strapped boy may have to drop out and may never return to college or for future graduate study.

5) In some instances, high school and even grade school did not adequately prepare them for the rigors of college work- their math or writing skills are poor or there are other skill deficits which interfere with optimal functioning i.e. time management skills, organizational skills, library and research skills etc.

6) Sadly, there are some of those who simply do not believe that the time investment will reap any reward. Or, some people may simply be overinvested in other students who may manifest a greater deal of potential.

7) They may ave been mentored, but have not been taught the networking skill and other subtle skills necessary for achieving success in whatever area of expertise.

8) Involvement in drugs and alcohol may prematurely terminate the growth and development of one's potential.

9) While someone has served as a mentor, he or she may not have been a " role model " sufficiently.

10) Some mentors may simply have a problem relating to the culturally different and disadvantaged. Or, on the other hand, there may be some students who may have difficulty relating to their mentors in either a program that is institutionally organized or an informal program which apprently just occurs.

11) Some students may not fit into the mold of what the mentor is trying to re-make them into.

12) Lack of a support system in college leads to lonliness, alienation and isolation.

13) Some mentors or possible mentors are simply overwhelmed with other duties, responsibilities, obligations and other duties (perhaps coaching, writing or research) and simply do not have adequate amounts of time.

14) The college or university may have other priorities for those who would be good mentors. Time constraints are operative.

Sternberg (1989) has indicated that " mentoring is the main way to increase intellectual skills. Most of what people learn, I believe, is from role modeling. I tell my own students that from the start. The main thing they will learn in graduate school is gleaned almost exclusively from modeling. Ask yourself how much of what you used in your job is stuff you learned in courses. Probably almost none of it. What you get out of schooling is a sense of how role models operate- how they approach problems, how they formulate problems, how they deal with the details of everyday life, and so on. What a good school provides is good role models. " (p. 2).

In light of the very changing mix of college students, we are apt to encounter more students who may have potential but may be underprepared, may be student athletes, returning learners, students with specific or general learning disabilities, single parents, commuter students, culturally illiterate and possibly multiplly handicapped students.

Summary and Conclusions :

We know mentoring is important and that assistance is very much needed for the poor and various minoritiy and disadvantageed students. We need to look closely at why we are not mentoring this already underserved population and reprioritize our efforts towards both the males and the females in this underserved group.

This paper has listed some tentative hypotheses to be explored by mentors and those involved in student personnel and guidance services.

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